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# Back on New Orleans City Council, Oliver Thomas also coming back on air at WBOK

BY MATT SLEDGE | STAFF WRITER

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Schuyler Williams, general manager of WBOK, right, takes photos of Oliver Thomas, left, former news anchor Sally-Ann Roberts, radio personality Blair "The Professor" Condoll, and WBOK executive producer Lee Hardy following their morning show at the new station on the campus of Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans on Thursday, May 20, 2021. (Photo by Chris Granger | The Times-Picayune | The New Orleans Advocate)

PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

Matt Sledge

Newly sworn-in New Orleans City Councilmember Oliver Thomas is set to resume a familiar gig on Tuesday: his morning talk show on WBOK-AM.

Thomas will juggle the 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. weekday slot with his job as District E councilmember for New Orleans East and the Lower 9th Ward.

Thomas said it was “humbling” that the station’s owners asked him to return to air.



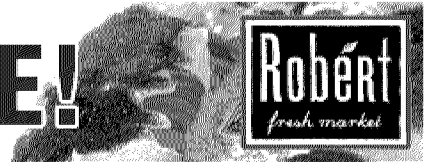
The old WBOK sign lies on a table before it's installed on the outside of the building where the AM radio station has moved onto the campus of Xavier University in New Orleans on May 20, 2021.

STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

“I agreed for a trial basis, to see, because I would like to help them,” Thomas said. “I enjoy the conversation. I think it helped during the campaign. I was so much more understanding of the issues.”

Thomas began hosting the show half a decade ago, but he gave up his drive-time mix of politics and current affairs when he began his successful campaign for the District E seat in July.

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Veteran broadcaster Sally-Ann Roberts took over the morning show, but Jeff Thomas, one of the station's owners (who is not related to Oliver) said it was always the plan for Oliver Thomas to resume hosting duties.



Oliver Thomas, right, interviews former news anchor Sally-Ann Roberts at the new WBOK radio station studio on the campus of Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans on Thursday, May 20, 2021. (Photo by Chris Granger | The Times-Picayune | The New Orleans Advocate)

PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

“He is an incredible talk-show host and has a wealth of knowledge that the citizens of New Orleans are going to benefit from,” said Jeff

Thomas. "Sally-Ann did us a great favor by filling in, but win or lose, we knew that Oliver wanted to come back."

Other elected officials in Louisiana have straddled, or in some cases crossed over, the line between media and politics in recent years. Gov. John Bel Edwards has an unpaid monthly call-in radio show where he fields questions from Louisianans about state government. In 2017, Newell Normand left his high-profile position as Jefferson Parish sheriff to become a radio host on WWL-AM.

WBOK asked the Louisiana Ethics Board on Dec. 29 for an advisory opinion on whether Thomas's return could run afoul of any ethics rules. Jeff Thomas said the station has received "preliminary" word that it won't, but the formal request is pending.



Schuyler Williams, left, general manager of WBOK radio, takes a photo of Oliver Thomas and Blair 'The Professor' Condoll as they interview former news anchor Sally-Ann Roberts at the station's new location on the campus of Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans on Thursday, May 20, 2021. (Photo by Chris Granger | The Times-Picayune | The New Orleans Advocate)

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The board has a March 4 hearing on the question, according to Kathleen Allen, the state ethics administrator.

"It would be premature for me to give any sort of answer given the question pending before the board," said Allen. "There are other, similar-type opinions. The board will look at the sections of law that are referenced in those to see if it applies."

Oliver Thomas said an unfavorable opinion would mark the end of his time as a host. Neither City Hall, nor any other topics, will be off-limits when the councilman gets back behind the mic, Jeff Thomas said.



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"He's free to talk freely, and we encourage him to be open and transparent," he said.

The morning drive-time slot is one of the most coveted in talk radio. Oliver Thomas was one of the few holdovers when the venerable AM station, known as Louisiana's oldest Black-owned outlet, was acquired in 2020 by a group including actor Wendell Pierce and local businessmen.

City Council members are allowed to hold outside employment and several have supplemented their \$93,504 annual salary by doing so in recent years.



WBOK executive producer Lee Hardy holds up a note to remind Oliver Thomas, top center, how much time he has left in his show as he works the control board at the new WBOK radio station located on the campus of Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans on Thursday, May 20, 2021. Thomas and Blair "The Professor" Condoll, far left, were interviewing retired news anchor Sally-Ann Roberts. (Photo by Chris Granger | The Times-Picayune | The New Orleans Advocate)

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District A Councilmember Joe Giarrusso draws income from his outside work for a law firm.

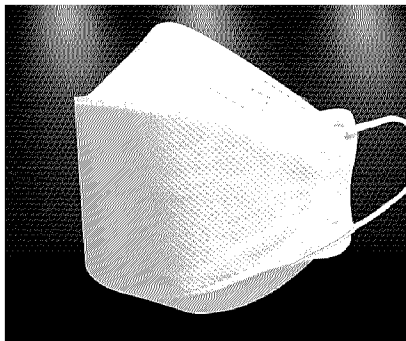
Former at-large Councilmember Jason Williams was a criminal defense attorney while he chaired the council's criminal justice committee.



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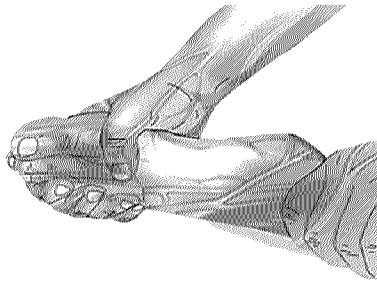
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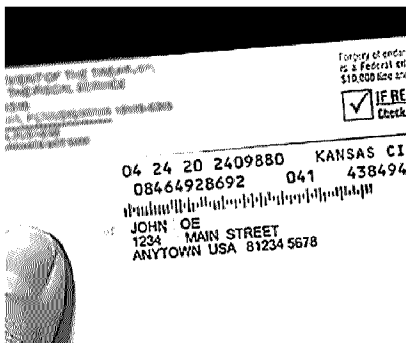
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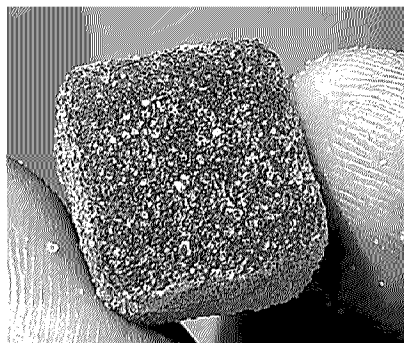
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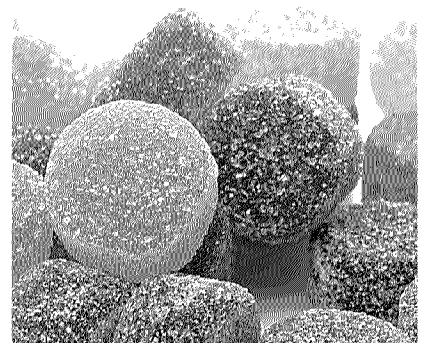
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